

Kingsbridge Rural District Council.

MEDICAL OFFICER OF HEALTH'S ANNUAL REPORT FOR 1903.

Gentlemen,—In presenting to you my annual report, the tenth, on the matters affecting the public health in your district, I have had regard to the memorandum received from the Local Government Board asking for information on various points with which you are all so conversant as to perhaps deem their recapitulation unnecessary. Reminding you therefore that this report is made for the information also of the Local Government Board, of the County Council and (as regards the administration of the Factories and Workshops Act), of the Secretary of State, I shall deal with the sanitary administration in this district under the following heads :—

PHYSICAL FEATURES AND GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS.

The country is hilly, and comprises a large number of small villages and hamlets, the inhabitants of which are mainly engaged in agricultural pursuits, there being no other industries whatever. The population is sparse and relatively poor, wages are low, and many of the young men are drawn from the district to serve in the navy or army, or find more remunerative employment elsewhere. As a consequence, those who are considered to be physically unfit for either of the services, being left in the district, magnify the ordinary proportion of young people of mental or bodily ill-health, and this perhaps may account for that high rate of poor-law relief and poor-law medical relief to which attention has so often been called by one of the inspectors of the Local Government Board.

HOUSE ACCOMMODATION: ADEQUACY AND FITNESS.

The house accommodation in the district may be considered fairly satisfactory: in some few instances I have found that the sleeping apartments do not provide what is generally considered an adequate amount of cubic air space, but it must be borne in mind that this is generally compensated by the out-door occupation of the occupants, and that the apartments are only occupied for a short period of the twenty-four hours. Most of the cottages and smaller farm houses have their ground floors paved on the soil itself, and this exaggerates the dampness inherent in the climate.

As a rule the air space surrounding the dwellings is sufficient, but the houses being mostly old, the windows are small, ill-placed, and not made to open efficiently; and consequently natural ventilation is curtailed. The bedroom windows are seldom made to open top and bottom, and those rooms which are provided with fire places generally have the chimneys bricked in or otherwise occluded.

SUPERVISION OVER THE ERECTION OF NEW HOUSES.

Before any new house erected in the district is allowed to be occupied, the owner has to satisfy your Authority that the same is provided with an ample and pure supply of water at a reasonable distance, and a satisfactory system of sewage disposal, and this enactment is invariably carried out. There are in force, concerning the erection of new houses, no other regulations beyond these mentioned.

SEWAGE AND DRAINAGE.

Nearly all cottages and groups of cottages have a system of privy-middens or dry earth closets: most of the villages are provided with a water-borne sewage system, and the dwellings within the statutory distance are connected thereto. Many of these sewers have their outfall in contiguous water-courses, and in some instances in estuaries or foreshores. There is in my opinion no locality in the district where special improvements are required, as during the year under consideration, Woodleigh and Chillington have been supplied with a drainage system, and improvements and extensions have been made in Aveton Gifford, Loddiswell, Malborough, and West Alvington.

REMOVAL AND DISPOSAL OF HOUSE REFUSE.

All cottages and isolated houses, together with those in villages, dispose of their house refuse by means of pits, generally covered and often connected with their privies; and eventually use the same for their gardens or farms. The town of Modbury alone possesses a public scavenger, who collects and removes the refuse at stated intervals.

WATER SUPPLY.

The district as a whole is well supplied with potable water, most of the villages having a system derived from neighbouring springs or wells. Isolated houses or cottages mainly depend for their supply on wells. For its numerical importance, Aveton Gifford is at present the most inconveniently supplied, as there is no pipe-distribution in the village, a proportion of the houses obtaining their water from private wells, but the majority having to carry it a considerable distance from one public well situated in the middle of the village. Considering the size of this village, with several hundred inhabitants, I am of opinion that the question of obtaining for it an adequate supply of pure water is one that should as soon as possible again engage the attention of your authority.

The question of the improved water supply for the village of Slapton has during the last three or four years received your attention; and, though your Council decided from the first that it was desirable to augment the present supply in order to provide for the higher levels, nothing definite has been undertaken until the end of this present year, when a scheme has been adopted to convey water from the neighbourhood of the Public Schools for distribution throughout the whole of the village. The plans have been approved, and tenders have been invited for carrying out the work, which will be completed in a few months' time.

The public water supply of West Alvington has this year been extended by pipe to the eastern end of the village, which arrangement, when the supply is ample, is a great convenience to the inhabitants in that part.

In the beginning of the year I reported that I considered that the inhabitants of the south portion of the village of Hope had to carry their water a very unreasonable distance; I regret that so far nothing has been done to remedy this matter.

During the year I have analysed twenty samples of drinking water from the various supplies, and have rendered you my reports thereon in due course.

SUPERVISION OF LODGING-HOUSES, WORKSHOPS, &c.

There are no common lodging-houses in the district, nor any "offensive trades" carried on.

The slaughter-houses, dairies, cowsheds, bakehouses, and workshops have been periodically inspected by me, and been found generally satisfactory.

In particular I must commend the enterprise of the butcher at East Buckland, who has put up a modern ice-house for the preservation of meat in hot weather.

As regards the cow-houses, I would draw your Council's attention to the fact that in many of the farms the paving and drainage of the sheds are far from ideal, and that the statutory amount of air space per animal is often not reached. Fortunately this is compensated by the fact that the animals seldom remain stalled for any length of time.

NUISANCES.

Numerous minor nuisances have been discovered in my inspections during the year, and have mostly in due course been abated under your orders.

One of the most serious recurring nuisances is that of the pond in Well-street, Loddiswell, which periodically during the dry season becomes very objectionable to the neighbouring houses.

The greater portion of the pond should, in my opinion, be filled in, so that the flow of water through it may be more continuous, and the retaining wall at the lower end should be made tight so that the water may be kept in a channel, instead of as at present soaking a large expanse of surrounding ground, the evaporation from which in hot weather proves a serious nuisance.

INFECTIOUS DISEASES.

The means at our disposal of dealing with infectious diseases consists in compulsory notification, and as a sequence, the domestic isolation of the cases and disinfection of the premises so far as circumstances permit. We at present have no isolation hospital, and I am sorry to say that measles and whooping-cough are not scheduled by your authority as notifiable. The former disease was so prevalent this year that on 12th June I reported to you as follows:—"I would again point out that owing to measles not being scheduled by your authority as a notifiable disease under the provisions of the Infectious Diseases Notification Act, it is only by rumour or the fact of my attending cases of this disease in my own practice, that I become aware of its existence, and under these circumstances this knowledge is generally obtained by me when the disorder has become so general that it is impossible to prevent its spreading, except by the somewhat serious action of closing the public schools. I would once more suggest the advisability of your Council's including measles as a disease to be notified." Your Council decided however to take no action in the matter.

During the year I have received 46 notifications of infectious disease in the district, viz.:—Diphtheria, 16; croup, 2; erysipelas, 9; scarlet fever, 14; and enteric fever, 5. Two cases of diphtheria and one of enteric fever, all in the Modbury district, proved fatal.

DIPHTHERIA.

Of the 16 cases, two occurred in the Kingsbridge district in widely-separated farms, viz., one in the parish of Loddiswell and one in the parish of East Allington, and appeared to be sporadic, as there was not found any appreciable local cause to account for them. One case in the West Alvington district was, in my opinion, due to defective sanitary arrangements, which were immediately reported to your authority, and in due course remedied. The remaining 13 cases, which all occurred in the village and neighbourhood of Kingston, in the registration district of Modbury, constituted what may be considered an epidemic. This disorder has for the last three years been more or less endemic in the locality, and I am of opinion that the chief origin of its existence was focussed in the sanitary imperfections of the Kingston day-schools. The defects consisted primarily in the unsatisfactory arrangements for the flushing of the offices, and secondarily in the imperfect ventilation of the school itself. The ventilation of the school has been improved, and better arrangements for the flushing of the offices are now being made under the supervision of the architect of the Education Committee of the Devon County Council.

In those houses where the disease was existing, all suspicion of insanitary conditions has been removed.

ENTERIC FEVER.

It is satisfactory to find that there have been only five cases of this disease recorded during the year in such a wide area as that under your authority. One only of the five cases proved fatal.

Each case was individually inquired into, but only one, that in the West Alvington district, could be accounted for by local sanitary defects: here the well water used for drinking purposes was found to be contaminated by sewage from a broken drain, and steps were immediately taken to put this right. Owing however to the contamination of the soil, the well water is still undrinkable, and as the public supply has now been carried by pipe in this direction, the well has been permanently closed.

MEMBRANOUS CROUP.

These two cases occurred in one family in the West Alvington district, and were undoubtedly sporadic.

ERYSIPELAS.

Of the nine cases of erysipelas, none were of a severe type: they were widely scattered throughout the district, and could be assigned no special origin.

SCARLET FEVER.

Of the 14 cases of scarlet fever, two occurred in the Stokenham district, and at the time I formed the opinion that they had been contracted at Dartmouth, where the disease was then very active. The other 12 cases occurred at Malborough in the months of November and December. The first case was that of a child at school, and the origin of this I have found it impossible to account for, but occurring among school children it proved, in my opinion, the focus for the other eleven cases. As far as possible isolation was enforced, disinfection of the premises carried out, and as a further precaution the public school was closed for some time.

None of the cases was fatal.

SCHOOLS.

During the year I have had to report on only two cases of infectious diseases in their districts, to close the following schools for the periods mentioned.

Slapton	5 weeks from 20th January.
Goveton	3 weeks from 16th February.
Blackawton	2 weeks from 20th April.
Kingston	5 weeks from 25th March.
Strete	5 weeks from 7th May.
Thurlestone	4 weeks from 24th June.
Bigbury	2 weeks from 22nd October.
Malborough	4 weeks from 4th December.

In most cases the prevailing disease was measles.

OVERCROWDING.

During the year I have had to report on only two cases of overcrowding: one at Thurlestone, the other at Malborough; both of these have been abated.

INSPECTION.

During the year I have again made numerous inspections to inquire into nuisances or to discover them; and I have in addition made systematic house-to-house inspections of the villages of Kingston, Woodleigh, Bantam, East and West Buckland, Chillington, and Aveton Gifford, the result of which has been that numerous nuisances have been abated, and many questions have been presented to your authority, the decision of which has materially conduced to an improvement in the sanitary condition of the district.

VITAL STATISTICS.

During the year there have been registered 153 deaths at all ages, giving a general death-rate from all causes of 13·4 per thousand of population; and 246 births, making a birth-rate of 21·6 per thousand of population.

There have been registered 5 deaths from the "principal zymotic diseases," viz., 2 from measles, 2 from diphtheria, and 1 from enteric, giving a zymotic death-rate of 4·1 per thousand of population.

The deaths of children under one year as percentage of total deaths is 11·1.

The deaths of children under five years of age as percentage of total deaths is 15·6.

The deaths of children under one year of age as percentage of registered births is 6·9.

The birth-rate is lower than during the last two years, but is what may now be considered a normal rate for this district.

The death-rate is particularly satisfactory as it is much below the average of the last ten years, and is the lowest recorded for seven years.

The zymotic death-rate is exactly half that of last year, and is a favourable one.

There is again a diminution in the deaths of children under one year of age as percentage of total deaths, which may be considered satisfactory, seeing that the percentage of last year was the lowest recorded for twelve years: and the same may be said of the percentage of deaths to registered births. Again the percentage of deaths under five years is the lowest with two exceptions recorded in the last thirteen years.

The death-rates in the various registration districts for the last ten years is appended hereunder to afford a means of ready comparison.

	Black- awton.	Kings- bridge.	Mod- bury.	W. Alv- ington.	Stoken- ham.
1894.	16·7	18·1	11·1	23·9	16·7
1895.	17·2	12·8	23·1	22·1	24·6
1896.	13·1	8·7	12·9	15·9	10·9
1897.	15·8	12·9	17·0	14·5	17·7
1898.	15·5	8·8	10·2	13·4	13·5
1899.	16·8	9·9	14·2	13·9	11·9
1900.	14·7	12·9	17·9	16·3	14·04
1901.	13·0	8·9	16·2	13·9	14·6
1902.	13·0	10·5	14·8	11·8	19·9
1903.	17·4	7·4	11·9	18·8	12·7

Of the 36 deaths in the Blackawton district, 16 occurred at the age of seventy or over, and five at the age of eighty or over, the oldest being eighty-five.

Of the 15 deaths in the Kingsbridge district, three occurred at seventy or over, and two at eighty or over, the oldest being eighty-four. It is disappointing however to remark that among the total 15, six or 40 per cent. were of children under one year of age. The Kingsbridge district indeed has the unenviable record of accounting for 30 per cent. of the total number of deaths of children in the whole district.

In the Modbury district, of the 33 deaths, sixteen or nearly 50 per cent. occurred at the age of seventy or over, seven of these being eighty or over, and the oldest 90. This is also the greatest age at death recorded in the whole district.

Stokenham with its 34 deaths also presents a satisfactory picture, as 18, again nearly 50 per cent., occurred at or beyond the age of seventy, 8 at or beyond eighty, and the oldest was 89.

Of West Alvington again we may speak in similar terms, 17 of the 35 deaths being of persons at or over the age of seventy, while six were 80 or over, the oldest being 84.

Summarising these figures, we find that the four districts of Blackawton, Modbury, Stokenham, and West Alvington, accounting for 138 deaths, have a percentage of nearly fifty at or beyond the natural expectation of life; while the Kingsbridge rural, of its 15 deaths has only 5 at or over seventy, while of the remaining ten only four occurred between the ages of one and 70, and the disquieting number of six before the attainment of twelve months.

ZYMOTIC DISEASES.

Stokenham, Kingsbridge, and Blackawton are happily free from any zymotic fatality. West Alvington had one death, and Modbury four from measles and diphtheria.

INFLUENZA.

Two deaths have again this year been registered as due to influenza, making five recorded from this disease during the last fifteen years.

PHTHISIS.

There have been registered nine deaths as due to this disease, distributed throughout the district as follows:—Blackawton, 3; Modbury, 2; West Alvington, 4; giving a death-rate of 7 per thousand of population; this rate is one of the lowest recorded.

Kingsbridge and Stokenham had no deaths from this disease.

VIOLENCE.

Nine deaths are this year attributed to violence, eight of them being due to accident and one to suicide.

CANCER.

There have been nine deaths registered as due to cancer, the same as last year. These have occurred proportionately throughout the district, and compare favourably with previous years.

OPERATION OF THE FACTORIES AND WORKSHOPS ACT, 1901.

Under section 132 of this Act, it is my duty as medical officer to your Council to report as follows:—I have personally from time to time inspected the various workshops and work-places in the district (there are no factories), and as regards (a) general cleanliness, (b) air space, (c) ventilation, and (e) provision of suitable sanitary arrangements, have found them satisfactory. (d) ~~the~~ trades involving "wet processes" carried on in the district. I have failed to find that any "home work" is carried on.

Appended are the tabular statements required by the Local Government Board, the contents of which I have furnished to the extent of the information in my possession.

I am, Gentlemen,

Your obedient servant,

WILLIAM HY. WEBB, M.D.,

Medical Officer of Health.

The Kingsbridge Rural District Council.

The only "offensive trade" carried on in the district is that of a pellmonger & tanner, the premises of which have been frequently inspected and found satisfactory.



